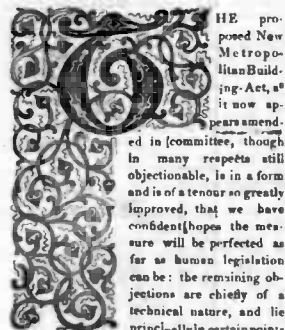


The Builder.

NO. LXX.

SATURDAY, JUNE 8, 1844.



THE proposed New Metropolitan Building-Act, as it now appears amended in committee, though in many respects still objectionable, is in a form and is of a tenour so greatly improved, that we have confidently hoped the measure will be perfected as far as human legislation can be: the remaining objections are chiefly of a technical nature, and lie principally in certain points of misused practice, which, though the insisting upon them by the framers and promoters of the act could give them no satisfaction, yet the enacting them might render an otherwise good statute so obnoxious as to endanger its usefulness and permanence. We are engaged upon a minute review of the bill in its present form, in comparing it with the form in which it first appeared, and in weighing the various suggestions which have been made upon the subject in the different reports which have been published: all this is no small labour, and the result of our occupation upon the subject we propose giving in our next number, with cuts of the sections of walls, as they are now proposed to be arranged. We advise a temperate and close immediate view of the details of the bill to be made by every person likely to be affected by the enactment of such a measure, so that if a new Building-Act be not passed this year, one may be so perfected that early in the ensuing spring it may be passed without the necessity for new agitation, or further consideration of its details.

The separate bill relating to the prevention of damage by fire, a copy of which we lately gave, is so short that it might well have been inserted in the same general act, nor do we see why it is otherwise, unless, indeed, the government, despairing of passing any new Building-Act, resolved that the less intricate matter of a Fire-bill meeting with no opposition, might without delay be passed, containing any improvements which could be suggested.

One thing we observe in the improved proposed Building-Act, viz., sufficient care has not been taken to diminish the quantity of combustible materials used in buildings. We firmly assert good building, and a proper humane care of the lives and property of every human being within the realm, imperiously demand that combustible materials shall be kept from all party-walls.

It is some years since we have used any bond-timber whatever in any building; iron vat-hooping is so much better a use, is so readily carried without danger near fires, as to be in every respect superior to timber. Whenever it is necessary to insert the end of any timber in a party-wall, we should so allow it only when covered with a

sheath of iron; plates in party-walls are commonly so broken by the occurrence of fires, that they become useless as ties, hence we have for a long while past mostly superseded them by granite and other kinds of stone. The day is not very far distant when a knowledge of architectural statics being duly restored, a total change will come over practical architecture, and those roofs which are now made combustible will be no longer so,—when vaulting and abutment are so distinctly understood, that churches and other public buildings, improved in fabric and beauty, will have their excellences carried down to posterity, because they cannot be burnt. We know there is a sad perverseness in the human heart, by which abuses, though again and again brought to prominent view, are still persisted in, notwithstanding the remedy of such abuses is again and again shown to bring increase of beauty. When this is reformed, into oblivion will fall the unstable timber roofs, which, in defiance of science, prudence, and a right knowledge of legitimate architecture, are now so frequently set over churches and chapels, and which, indeed, have never received the approval of any competent judge, but are, from their false construction, in the very teeth of every prudent and scientific architect who has ever practiced or laid-down canons upon the subject. Ere long a right knowledge of Freemasonry will cause these nuisances to be entirely superseded by vaulting compressed firmly in every joint, and admirably buttressed and gined into stability; walls of even very small buildings will no longer be thrust over roof-terraces will no longer be all in a state of destructive strain, nor will there be that concealment or mystification of ignorance and bad construction which is so fatally indulged in by the modern perverters of architectural science, who have lately gone back some centuries in the scientific knowledge and construction of roofs.

We are pained by seeing the observations relative to the re-institution of the use of chimney climbing-boys, which will be found in the report inserted in another part of our work. We can see no case sufficient for the re-tolerance of so inhuman a practice. If the present machines used for chimney-cleaning be insufficient for the purpose, that does not, in our opinion, afford the slightest reason for repealing an act which has declared penal a brutal practice, the mere necessity for the forbidding of which by statute was a disgrace to the age and country; and we trust, that if there were in a Parliament, forgetful of its public duty in a Christian land, the bare shadow of a chance of repeal, the whole body of the humane in these realms would rise up in arms, to decry, with one acclamation, a practice so savage and disgraceful. We have heard of such a thing as the kidnapping of one master carpenter's child, and the selling of him to a chimney-sweep. We have heard, too, of another master carpenter, who, languishing in "the article of death," recognized, in the body of a half-roasted child, who had been forced up that father's kitchen-chimney on fire, which should have cooked his sustenance,—that illegitimate offspring whose neglect he was counting over with his other sins.

We have had thirty years' experience on the subject of chimneys, and we beg to declare our unqualified opinion, that no necessity whatever exists for the employment of chimney-climbing-boys. We believe that, with proper apparatus, chimneys can alone be properly cleaned. The mere passing of a boy through a flue is not the slightest guarantee that it shall be cleansed; and we do not believe that,

when boys ascended chimneys, they were ever half cleansed. We believe that the kicking and scrambling of children through difficult parts of flues, practically damages them an infinite deal more than any ordinary machine; but even those machines may damage flues, that only affords a reason for the improvement of such machines, by shortening their rods, or by other modifications. But the most powerful argument against such a frightful scandal is the necessity which the continuance of such an act would bring for an improved structure of flues themselves, by obliging them to be made easier in their turns, and of materials better than those used at present. Now flues, which ought to be of the choicest work and materials, are made so unsoundly, that in many places, particularly in their cross-withs, there is often nearly as much mortar as brick: no wonder then that with should be worn away, and smoke should penetrate from one flue to another.

It is not our intention this week to carry further our observations relative to the measure, but we shall give thereon amply detailed observations in our next.

P.

NEW BUILDINGS BILL.

In our last number we noticed the meeting of the Master Carpenters which took place at the Freemasons' Tavern, Great Queen-street, Lincoln's-Inn-Fields, to receive a report, and further to consider the amended New Buildings Bill; we now having received a detailed account of the proceedings which then took place, are enabled to lay them before our readers. Mr. R. Biers, the president, upon bringing up the report of the committee, stated that the deputation appointed at a former meeting had had an interview with Lord Lincoln, the First Commissioner of Works and Buildings, who was assisted at the conference by Mr. Pennefather, one of the Crown surveyors. The deputation urged upon his lordship, that although the Bill formed a considerable improvement upon many of its predecessors, yet several objections existed in the intended new Bill. The proposed Act then under their notice is dated 1st March, 1844, the interview with his lordship was on the 25th of April, since which period the Bill has gone through a Committee of the House, and an amended Bill has been printed, dated the 17th inst. He (the chairman) would call the attention of the meeting more particularly to this amended Bill, and the alterations therein, as meeting the objections urged upon his lordship as to the several clauses in the former Bill. The deputation stated the objections to reversing the rates in the Bill, calling what is at present a first-rate house a fifth-rate house, and a fifth-rate house a first-rate house, a method of description at variance with all present practice, and likely to lead to much inconvenience; in the amended Bill this has been altered, and a first-rate house now remains of its original designation; and buildings beyond a first-rate are now called, as suggested by your report, an *extra-rate*. The amended Bill still leaves undecided what is to be the nature the general line of fines, for the regulation and restriction of projections; this is one of the faults in the existing Act of Parliament (14 Gen. 3, cap. 78), and ought in any new enactment to be defined precisely.

Your report recommended that in all new sites for building, the width of the streets ought to be regulated by the height of the intended buildings; by the amended Bill, it is proposed that no street shall be less than 40 feet wide, and that where houses are of height greater than 40 feet, the street is to be widened in proportion.

The section relative to dwelling-rooms, which were not to be inhabited unless of an area of 100 feet, has been altered, by taking away the restriction as to superficial extent, thus removing from the Bill a very objectionable and unjust proposition, which the society have from its first introduction opposed and endeavoured to get expunged; and as the amended Bill now stands, a room may be occupied as a dwelling apartment, if properly lighted and ventilated, propositions with which this society most fully concur. But upon the subject of ventilation, be (the chairman) was sorry to say that the government did not go so far as he thought they should; and here for a few minutes he would digress, and state that